

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit: Worship at Home – 20 September 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

A prayer for day 20 from the Methodist Prayer Handbook

In our weakness, O Christ, let us trust your strength; in our darkness let us see your light; in our doubt let us trust your presence and in our despair let us cling to your Cross; for your truth and your mercies’ sake. Amen.

Hymn: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer’s ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole  
And calms the troubled breast;  
’Tis manna to the hungry soul,  
And to the weary, rest.

Dear Name! the Rock on which I build,  
My Shield and Hiding Place,  
My never-failing Treasury filled  
With boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend,  
My Prophet, Priest, and King;  
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,  
Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,  
And cold my warmest thought;  
But when I see Thee as Thou art,  
I’ll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim  
With every fleeting breath,  
And may the music of Thy name  
Refresh my soul in death.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession (prayers from faith and worship.com)

Creator of all,  
Sustainer of all,  
Saviour of all,  
Your glory and majesty  
are beyond our understanding,  
Your power too awesome to behold.  
And yet your love enfolds us as a gentle breeze.  
Saviour of all ,  
Sustainer of all,  
Creator of all,  
We bless your holy name!

Father God,  
you are the one who leads us  
from darkness into light,  
from captivity into freedom,  
from anxiety into peace,  
from despair into joy.  
Yet we long to break free,  
choosing independence,  
convinced of our own wisdom,  
forgetting your love and grace.  
Forgive us,  
draw close to us,  
embrace us once again  
in your loving arms,  
and enable us to follow you  
in worship and grateful service each day of our lives. Amen.

Our God is a gracious forgiving God. To all who are sorry and want to begin again he says “Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven.”

Thanks be to God.

Reading: Jonah 3: 10 to the end of chapter 4

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

4But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ 4And the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ 5Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

6 The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. 7But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. 8When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’

9 But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?’ And he said, ‘Yes, angry enough to die.’ 10Then the Lord said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.11And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’

Reflection

St Benedict reminds us, we should never despair of the mercy of God. Jonah isn’t having any of that! Remember Nineveh, the capital of Israel’s greatest enemy, Assyria, was in Jonah’s mind, the dregs of the world. He’s tried to get out of going there but he’s now gone and expects God to damn them. They repent and God changes his mind about destroying them.

I believe in a Gospel of second chances, that no one is outside God’s love if they are given a chance to respond and do respond. They, as much as we, good pious people, are given a new beginning, forgiveness, out of the grace of God. That’s the Gospel isn’t it?   Where is Nineveh today?

Perhaps Nineveh says it cannot come to God because it is too far gone. Perhaps Nineveh near Ripon and the Lower Dales Circuit has met Jonah the Churchgoer, who has said to them “repent, but if you do, I can’t really accept you!” I have a lovely Geordie Bible somewhere in a packing box, where Jonah is a Methodist local preacher, planned by the Superintendent to Nineveh Street. The Super reminds Jonah of the discipline of honouring all your appointments on the Circuit plan!

Is God the God of another chance? I want to suggest to you that the major work of the Church is this another chance mission. People are yearning for a different narrative in their lives, especially people who’ve made mistakes or who have been rubbished all their lives. Imagine being forgiven for the first time in your life. Imagine being free of guilt and living differently. Imagine being included in a fellowship you’ve never thought you were worthy of belonging to. It’s never too late.

The God of another chance offering repentance and forgiveness and a new beginning, even for the most desperate and the most alien of audiences.

This never too late, another chance stuff is the heart of what we believe, isn’t it? Some commentators have called Jonah the “Gospel before Christ.”

The story that makes us who we are tells us Jesus was killed, put away in a tomb, and that, they thought, was that,-it was the end.

Until he died there must have been hope that he would do something to save himself. But when he died it must have seemed like that hope died with him. It was too late. But then, on the first day of the week, when some of his friends went to tend his body they encountered a new beginning.

Part of the story of Jesus is that it is never too late. Part of the story we're given to share is that no circumstance is beyond the power of God and that nobody is beyond the redemption we are invited to accept. The Gospel is not just for "church people" and not just for "good people," but for all of God's children. Our mistakes do not define us, and we are not trapped forever in the messes we make. By the power of God, hope does not die, and in Christ it is never, never too late. Another chance.

That is the Gospel of Christ. It is never too late, second chances, a new narrative. It is never too late for Nineveh to turn. It is never too late for Jonah like attitudes to turn. It is never too late for people to come to the foot of the Cross and say I need to be forgiven, can you help me, I want to begin again.

It is never too late. I hope our little exploration into Jonah today encourages us to be open, to never limit God, to not be judgmental and most of all to be part of God’s amazing plans. Jonah didn’t cope with God, I pray we might be a little broader in our vision of his kingdom where all who respond are welcome, and not condemned for all eternity.

Hymn: Come let us sing of a wonderful love – Singing The Faith

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
tender and true;

out of the heart of the Father above,

streaming to me and to you:

wonderful love

dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,  
joyfully came;  
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,  
sharing their sorrow and shame;

seeking the lost,

saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;  
Why do they roam?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget;  
Home! weary wanderers, home!  
Wonderful love  
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O Thou wonderful love,  
come and abide,  
lifting my heart till it rises above  
envy and falsehood and pride:  
seeking to be  
lowly and humble, a learner of Thee.

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Father

For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church,

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

For the mission of our communities ,

that in faithful witness we may proclaim the Gospel.

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

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For peace in the world

that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow among nations and peoples.

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

For all those in need in our communities

– the sick, suffering, unhappy, vulnerable and lonely – that they may be comforted and protected.

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

For grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God let us pray.

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

In communion with all those who have walked in the way of holiness.

Lord of compassion

In your mercy hear us.

We offer our prayers in Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Hymn: All for Jesus (John Mark

Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be  
Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans  
I surrender these into your hands  
All of my ambitions, hopes and plans  
I surrender these into your hands

For it's only in your will that I am free  
For it's only in your will that I am free

Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be

Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be  
Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans  
I surrender these into your hands  
All of my ambitions, hopes and plans  
I surrender these into your hands

For it's only in your will that I am free  
For it's only in your will that I am free  
Jesus, all for Jesus  
All I am and have and ever hope to be

Benediction

We go in peace to live and work to God’s praise and glory. Thanks be to God! Amen.